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THE SOUTH SHORE OF THE ISLAND OF CAPRI

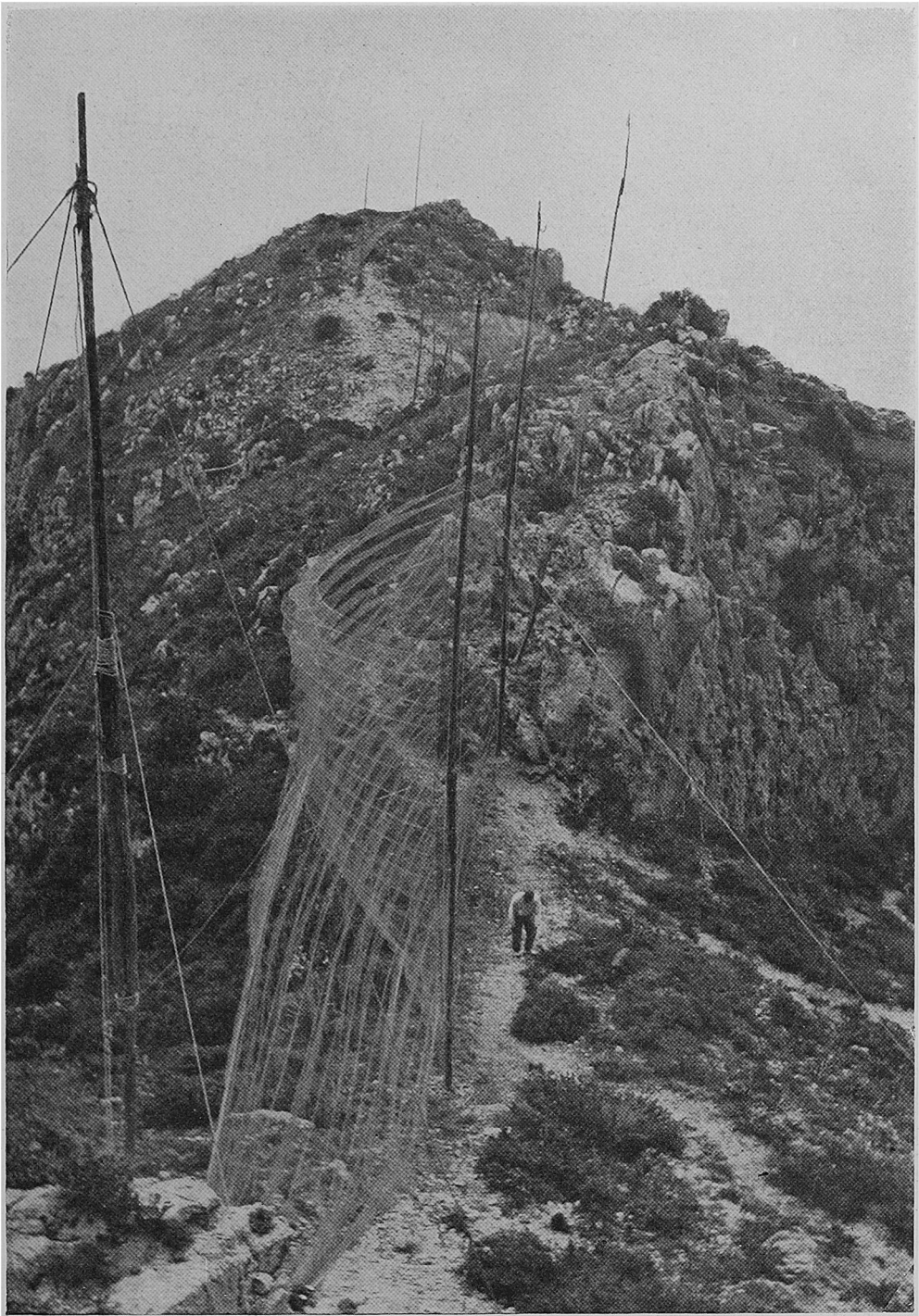
Quail-Time in Capri

BY ALDEN DANA BREWSTER

ALL the scandalous tales the inventive faculties of Tacitus, Suetonius and Juvenal were capable of, these ancient authors fastened upon the reputation of the Emperor Tiberius. These Roman gossipers would have us believe that in those last ten years of Tiberius's life, years spent by the Emperor in his twelve marvellous villas on the Island of Capri, witnessed his indulgence in every sort of debauchery which the seclusion of Capri's shore might make, with the least chance of observation, possible. All this malice they directed to one

who, having spent nearly a life-time in the field as a valiant and distinguished soldier, came, at the age of sixty-eight, to dwell on an island whose history these three historic scandal-mongers have dyed with the color of their virulence. Gone are Tacitus, Suetonius and Juvenal, gone is Tiberius, gone are the Emperor's twelve marvellous villas. But the story lives on, one more evidence of the power of fiction.

Perhaps all the tales woven by the insatiate three around the legend of the Emperor have whetted the curiosity of travellers, leading them to visit the island whose past was so littered with



THIS HUGE NET STRETCHED ON THE CREST OF A PRECIPITOUS CAPRI PROMONTORY SERVES TO ENMESH THE QUAIL WHICH FLY INTO IT AS THEY ALIGHT AT THIS SPOT ON THEIR FLIGHT NORTHWARD FROM AFRICA IN THE SPRING, OR WHEN RETURNING SOUTHWARD FROM BAVARIA IN THE AUTUMN



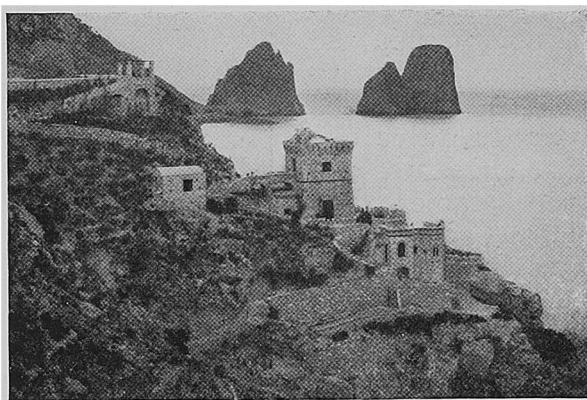
A GREAT STATIONARY QUAIL NET STRETCHED ALONG A CAPRI PROMONTORY

the slanderous jetsam and flotsam that rides on the tide of the perversely imaginative in history. Day after day the little *vaporetta* brings visitors from Naples and Sorrento to visit the Blue Grotto and to make a hurried excursion to Lo Capo, the north-east promontory of the island where stood the Villa Jovis—Pliny's Arx Tiberii—to which, some nine months after the fall of Sejanus, Tiberius retired. There visitors are shown the Salto di Tiberio (Timberio, the Caprese call it), and shiver as they are told that from its dizzy height, 974 feet sheer above the sea, the Emperor's victims were hurled to death by his orders. A projecting platform gives the shiverer the worth of his *lira*, and Tiberius thus has added new traducers to the list. *But*, should the visitor *not* depart from the island the

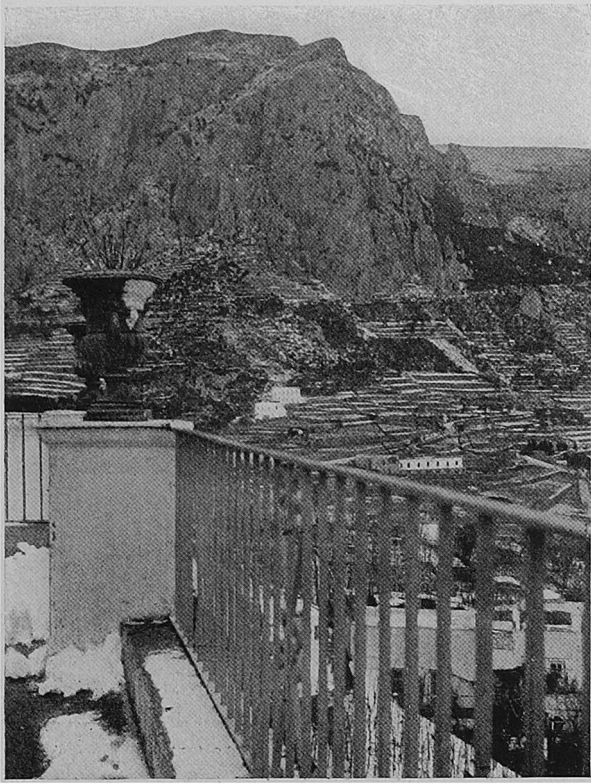
same day on which he arrives, should he linger for days, weeks or months in this veritable paradise of loveliness, he comes to discover for himself that Capri offers other things than an Emperor's imaginary escapades to interest one.

One afternoon as we sat in the Piazza chatting over coffee, outside of the *Caffè al Vermouth di Torino*, a little café with this tremendous name, my friend, the Consul, chanced to refer to the Vescovo della Quaglie, as he recounted the history of the Cathedral. "The Bishop of Quail? Why this curious title?" I asked. "I will tell you," my friend replied.

"As long as there has been any Island of Capri, and as long as there have been any quail, these birds have flown north from Africa in the Spring and south from the northland in the Autumn, breaking



CAPRI, LOOKING TOWARDS THE FARAGLIONI ROCKS



THE MIGRATING QUAIL STOP ON THEIR JOURNEY NORTHWARD IN SPRING AND SOUTHWARD IN AUTUMN TO REST ON THE SLOPES OF THE ISLAND OF CAPRI

their flight with a rest here of three days or so. I suppose from the time of the early Greek settlers here, Capri having no fauna of its own, these quail visitations transformed the island into a happy hunting ground for the time being, and thence onward quail-snaring became an occasional occupation which was early taken advantage of by the Bishops in the Middle Ages to add to their revenues, early grants giving them practically a monopoly of the game caught. In later centuries when it was found highly profitable to ship the game to the mainland, and also to markets as far distant as Paris, this monopoly became a very lucrative one and so the Bishop of Capri—later the See removed to Sorrento—became known as the 'Bishop of Quail', as holder of the quail-snaring privilege. While the common quail is found throughout Europe, in no place are these birds to be found in such great quantities as when they alight Spring and Autumn in Capri."

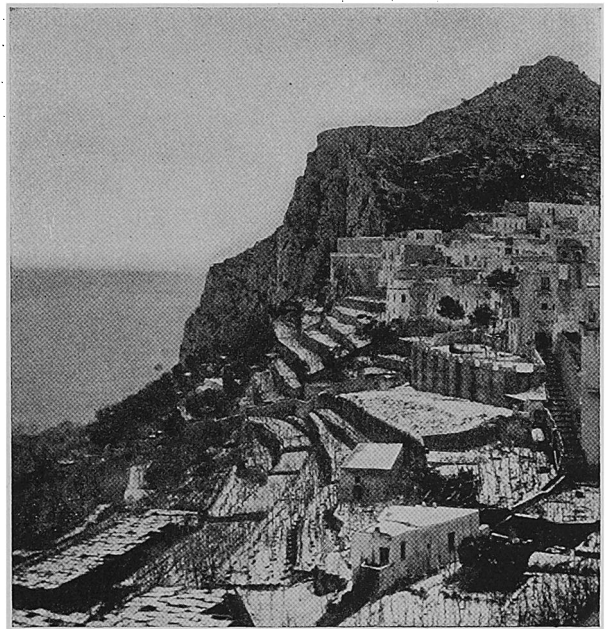
That afternoon I happened to meet good Don Enrico as he came from the Cathedral. I asked him to tell me more about the Vescovo della Quaglie. Don Enrico frowned. "We should try to be more civilized now", he commented, "the quail-snaring is a very cruel thing."

I had thought of that when the Consul was speaking, for I could not forget that there seemed so little regard for bird-life on the part of the Italians who seemed to think nothing of slaughtering song-birds to serve their tables, reminding one of the dishes of peacock tongues that formed part of the cuisine of imperial days. "But what of the quail?"

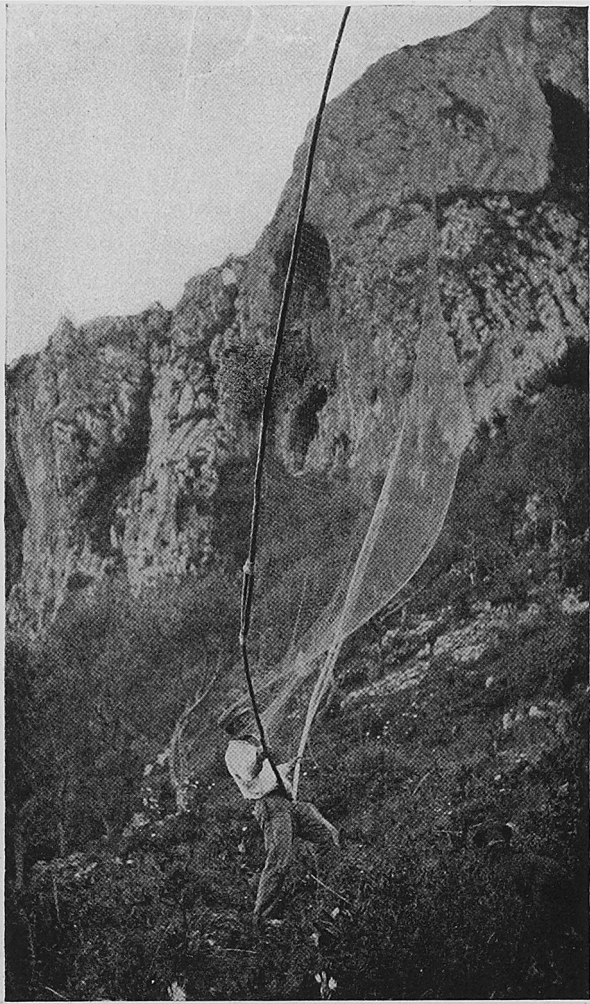
"Ah," said Don Enrico, again shaking his head, "come with me early tomorrow morning and I will show you."

Early the next morning we started forth, turning our steps down the Tragara, thence following the footpath past the remains of a Roman house discovered in 1885, past the Faraglioni—three precipitous cliffs, the larger of which, the Scopolo, rises out of the sea to a height of 288 feet, we skirted the base of Tuoro Grande, a hill 895 feet above sea level, and turned inland at the gorge which descends from the north.

An hour's walk brought us to a little



CAPRI IN LATE AUTUMN



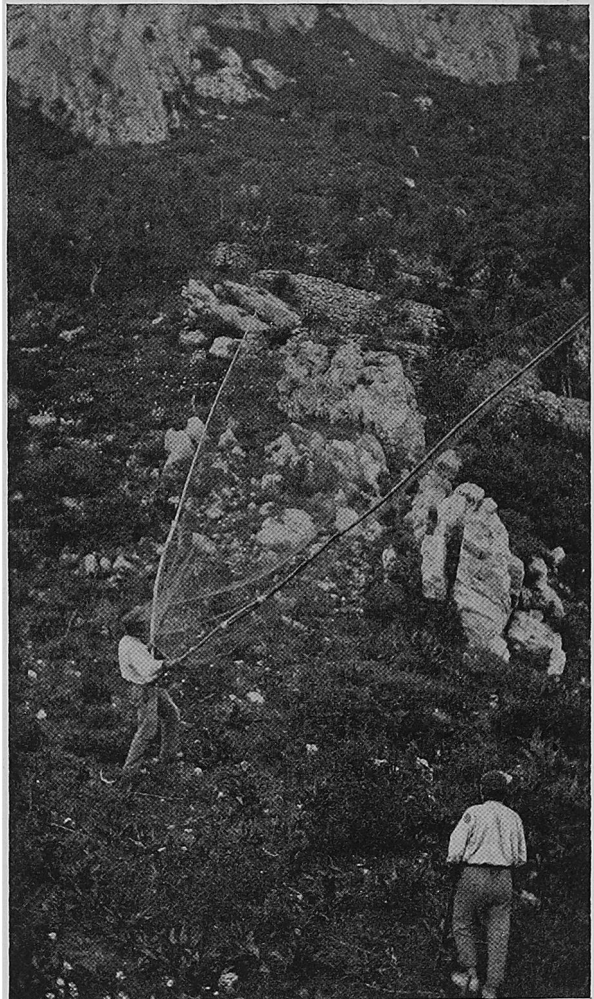
A CAPRESE QUAIL-SNARER MANIPULATING A PORTABLE SNARING-NET ATTACHED TO BAMBOO POLES

group of houses whence our path stretched on down to the other side of the little valley and on to the Arco Naturale, which, in ancient times was probably a shrine of Mithras, the unconquered Sun God, whose cult was introduced from the East by the Romans.

All along the way Don Enrico chatted of this and of that, master as he was of the lore of the land. He was a true artist too, stopping at many a point as entranced with the strange beauty of the view as though it had not been familiar to him from boyhood through his sixty odd summers and as many winters.

Soon we found ourselves at dividing paths and choosing the upper one it brought us abruptly to the top of a jutting rock on which there was not

room for us to stand as we looked down upon the rocks and the sea below us. "What a picture!" I cried. "And still," said Don Enrico, "for some reason artists never seem to come to this spot, never seem to find their way beyond the Tragara. Then he pointed out to me what immediately had caught my eye, a huge net stretched from pole to pole of bamboo across a tiny table-land of furze-covered rock below us. As I looked down upon this great net it seemed like a magic web, glittering as it did in the sunlight as the breeze from seaward caught its meshes. "That," said Don Enrico, "does much of the mischief," and pointing to our right he added, "Tommaso and Henrico there do much of the rest!"



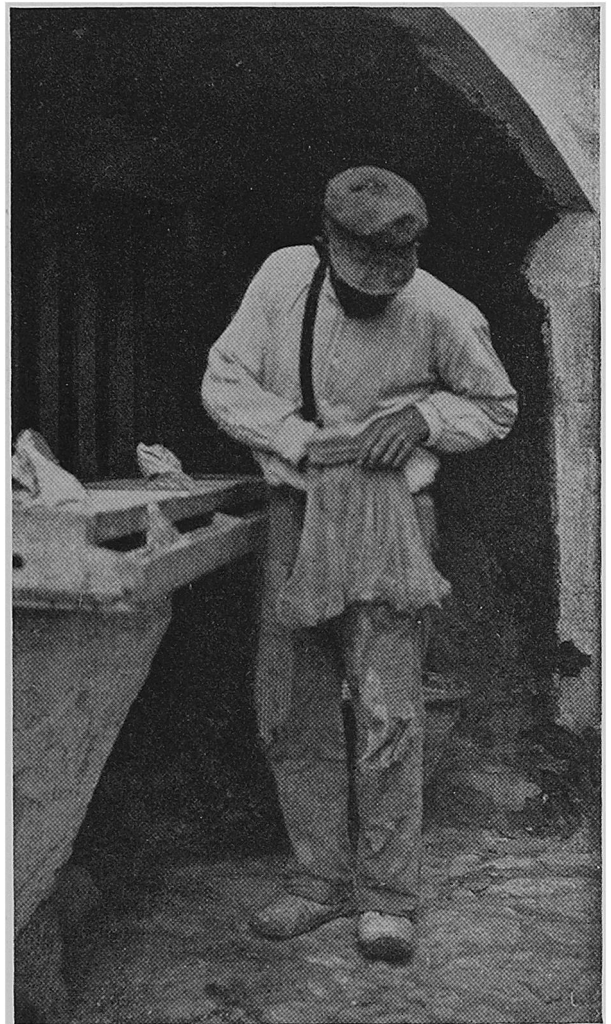
A CAPRESE QUAIL-SNARER STANDING READY TO MANIPULATE THE NET WHILE ANOTHER CONTADINO DRIVES THE QUAIL FROM SHELTER IN THE LOW UNDERGROWTH



A CAPRESE CONTADINO STARTING FORTH TO SNARE QUAIL, ACCOMPANIED BY THE ONLY DOG ON THE ISLAND OF CAPRI

I looked in the direction indicated and saw a man with two long bamboo rods fastened to a leather belt around his waist between which rods a fine-mesh net was stretched. The second man beat the brush with a heavy stick and a curious mongrel pup, the only dog in Capri, Don Enrico informed me,

helped in the process of scaring up the quail from their shelter in the furze. As the birds flew up they took flight distractedly away from the bush-beater and the dog, right towards the man with the net. Before they could turn he had entangled them deftly in its meshes. The quail were then removed and put in the bag which hung from his fellow-snarer's belt, to be taken home and in turn placed in crates in which the birds were shipped to the continental markets. We watched the men at work and a marvellous picture they made but we rejoiced that it was a pursuit soon to be discontinued, a pursuit now happily frowned upon by the very ecclesiastical authority that originally encouraged it.



A CAPRESE QUAIL-SNARER DEFTLY TRANSFERRING HIS MORNING'S "CATCH" FROM NET-POCKET TO SHIPPING CRATE